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Headline news for busy
church editors

February 1996

Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

ARE YOU VERTICALLY CHALLENGED? – Do you huff and puff climbing stairs? Then you will appreciate the challenge facing Linda Petrucelli. She's going to run, not walk, 1,576 steps up the Empire State building Feb. 22 in New York City.

It's an annual invitational race and Petrucelli, United Church Board for World Ministries secretary for the global sharing of resources, is doing it for Church World Service's landmine relief efforts.

CWS educates people about the 100 million land mines in 60 countries that maim or kill 26,000 innocent people annually, while its rehabilitation program aids survivors. In Cambodia alone, two million anti-personnel weapons are waiting to blow off the leg of the unwary, while American troops are discovering the same peril in Bosnia.

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WHERE TO FIND NEW CHURCH MEMBERS – Potential new members are out there as never before, claim evangelism specialists at the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. According to the Center for Social and Religious Research at UCC-related Hartford (Conn.) Seminary, 49.4 percent of Americans are unaffiliated with any church or attend services less than two times a year. A Homeland Board resource, "New Church Evangelism for the UCC," suggests four groups from which to draw new members.

1. **First Generation Americans.** Hundreds of thousands of new people, from Asia, Central and South America and Eastern Europe are taking up residence in our communities. Churches can offer them help in adjusting. Many newcomers bring their faith with them, and some churches have offered their facilities for worship.

2. **Generation Groups.** Sociologists say we cluster by age groups, each with its own life style. There's the Generation of Sacrifice (Depression and WWII), the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, 30th Generation and Generation X.

3. **Racial and ethnic populations.** Welcoming existing independent churches from among racial and ethnic groups represents one means toward achieving the multi cultural and multiracial church to which we are called.

4. **Magnet congregations.** These are organized around alternative visions of church and community life, often using concepts like liberation or radical inclusivity.

The challenge, of course, is how to appeal to these groups.

TO HEAL A COMMUNITY – It was an unusual crowd at Medford (Ore.) Congregational UCC that December Sunday: the mayor, police chief, realtors, gay rights activists, the curious, the concerned and just plain folks. They were all assembled to mourn two women, domestic and business partners, who had been murdered. Because Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill were outspoken in the gay community, there was fear that Medford was the target of a hate crime. The city had a redneck reputation and had voted for two anti-gay ballot initiatives. Where would it be safe to hold a healing service? Although the two slain women were not members, gay rights activists decided Medford Congregational was the right setting for a memorial service because the church enjoys a reputation as one of the most progressive institutions in the city.

"If anything can come out of this tragedy," says the Rev. Paul B. Robinson, pastor, "it has been to draw us together to give voice to that strong desire to be a good town, filled with people who want to live in peace, to be tolerant and to be free of fear."

The police later arrested a suspect who said it wasn't a hate crime, but admitted it was easier to pull the trigger because the victims were lesbians.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES! – Folks in the UCC take that dictum seriously. North Korea is one of only five countries in the world with which the United States has no diplomatic relations. Yet, when the [North] Korean Christian Federation made an appeal to Church World Service, the UCC responded. Individuals, churches and the World Board have contributed more than \$18,000 to help feed 500,000 people on the verge of starvation as the result of flood related crop losses.

This is one way people are helped with gifts from One Great Hour of Sharing. This year, OGHs Sunday is March 17.

MAY I QUOTE YOU? – “Just as during the Cold War, many churches engaged in dialogue with Marxism – and that led to greater understanding on both sides – we need to do the same now with Islamic radicalism.”

– Dale Bishop, Middle East area executive,
Common Global Ministries Board,
UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

HYMNAL SALES TAKE OFF – It’s becoming a best seller, and was even reported on by The New York Times. In just seven months, *The New Century Hymnal* has sold nearly 190,000 copies, says BHM. The last time the Board released a new hymnal, it took three years to sell 170,000 copies. BHM says it has already recovered its development costs.

Keeping You Posted is edited by William C. Winslow and produced monthly by the UCC Office of Communication, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115-1100.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT JET LAG – Every traveler flying overseas through numerous time zones experiences that feeling known as jet lag. You feel tired, can’t sleep, lose concentration or have stomach problems. It happens because your body still thinks it’s at home rather than at your destination. Your daily cycle of living is out of sync as the result of changes in daylight, time, meals and work schedules. Jet lag affects 75 percent of long distance travelers. There’s no cure, but there are some precautions you can take, says Eric Gass, UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) mission executive. Gass annually logs 50,000 miles, passing through 10 time zones on work trips to Asia. In general, says Gass – who recently attended a seminar to confirm his own experiences – you want to match sleeping and eating patterns of the destination country as soon as possible, even to changing habits before leaving. On the plane that would mean taking meals at destination meal times, not sneaking in a nap upon arrival, avoiding smoking and drinking, and exercising when you are supposed to be awake. High protein foods promote alertness, while carbohydrates induce sleepiness. Set your clock immediately to destination time. And don’t fret if it takes 3-5 days to bounce back to normal.

CALLING ALL HISTORICAL SCRIBES – There’s a rich vein of history running through the four strands that make up the UCC, and someone could be \$200 richer by mining one of them. The UCC’s Historical Council is offering that sum to the best essay on the history of the UCC and/or any of its antecedent traditions. Any UCC member can enter, lay or clergy. Particulars? Up to 4,000 words, double spaced, no hand written labors of love, please, deadline May 1, 1996. Submit entries to The Archivist, United Church of Christ, Schaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary, 555 W. James St., Lancaster, PA 17603.

WE CHOOSE LIFE – “Assault weapons have no other purpose but to end human life,” the Rev. Joey Noble warned a crowded press conference in the basement of the U.S. Capitol. The object of her wrath was those on the floor above, members of the House of Representatives, some of whom want to repeal that section of the Omnibus Crime bill banning assault guns.

“Assault weapons have already killed far too many women, men and children,” she testified. “In the name of God, it is time to stop choosing death and curses.”

Noble, a minister at Congregational UCC, Silver Spring, Md., represented the UCC’s Office for Church in Society. She said an NBC poll found that 76 percent of Americans want the Assault Weapons Ban to remain in place.

QUIZ – Who was the first president of the United Church of Christ? (Answer next month.)

OH NO! – Did you hear about the minister who had two dogs named Goodness and Mercy? They followed him everywhere he went.